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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JEDDAH 000178

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RIYADH, PLEASE PASS TO DHAHRAN; DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP

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SUBJECT: MOSQUE SERMONS FOR SAUDI ARABIA MARCH 21 AND 28,
AND APRIL 4: EASTERN PROVINCE, MECCA, AND MEDINA

Classified By: Acting Consul General CB Toney for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) BEGIN SUMMARY: The Saudi government (SAG) has plans to distribute to Imams and preachers "the ideas" (in particular social topics) they want them to include in their Friday sermons, according to a March 25 article featuring anonymous SAG official remarks in Saudi Arabic-language daily Al Watan.

To enforce the plan, the SAG will require that the Imams and preachers send copies of their sermons to the Ministry of Islamic, Endowments, Call, and Guidance Affairs. In the Eastern Province on March 21 and 28, and April 4, sermons covered social topics such as the growing divorce rate. Other topics included the release of Dutch MP Geert Wilder's film "Fitna" (approximate translation: strife), which the Imam described as an "insult" while adding that such acts would not slow the spread of Islam.

¶2. (C) In Mecca and Medina -- while the sermons did not mention the release of "Fitna" -- the Imams covered related issues. In Mecca, the Imam on March 28 called on Muslims to defend Muhammad "by all means and capabilities" but also encouraged dialogue "with all human beings." Likewise, the Imam in the March 28 sermon in Medina commented on freedom of expression stating that people should exercise it "within...the scale of religion." The March 21 and April 4 sermons focused on the importance of acting justly and practicing one's faith as well as on the harms of smoking. (COMMENT: Consistent with SAG policy, none of the March 21 sermons following Muhammad's March 20 birthday referenced the event. END COMMENT) END SUMMARY.

KINGDOM-WIDE

MEDIA REPORTS SAG PLANS TO PROVIDE IMAMS WITH SERMON "IDEAS"

¶3. (U) The Ministry of Islamic, Endowments, Call, and Guidance Affairs is finalizing "a study" to circulate to Imams and preachers "the ideas" they want them to include in their Friday sermons, according to a March 25 Al Watan article featuring remarks from an anonymous Ministry official. The official said that the sermons will address social issues, such as domestic violence, the rights of children, and youth problems.

¶4. (U) The plan, to have started at the end of March, is for the Ministry to send monthly the ideas to the Imams. The official added that preachers will have to send a copy of the

sermon to the Islamic Affairs Ministry Department of Mosques, which the Department will then place in the preacher's file. He explained that the purpose is to ensure that the preacher adheres to the Ministry's preferred topics, according to the article.

15. (U) In the past, the official alleged, follow-up committees have supervised the Imams and if they determine they have been absent three times in one month, they receive a warning. The official estimated, according to the newspaper, that there were approximately 50,000 Imams in the Kingdom and stated that they worked in fields such as government, business, and academia.

EASTERN PROVINCE

DEEMS DUTCH FILM "AN INSULT," WARNS AGAINST GROWING DIVORCE RATE

16. (C) At the Omar bin Omar bin Abd al-Aziz Grand Mosque on March 21, a substitute Imam spoke on the need for Muslims to express their gratitude through daily prayer to God for what he has given them. If they do not, he stated, God has the ability to take away what he has provided. He also said that history is full of people who forget and warned against repeating mistakes of past generations.

17. (C) Sheikh Mohammad Saleh al-Munajjid in his March 28 sermon compared different faiths and discussed the reaction to Dutch MP Geert Wilder's film "Fitna." He said that Islam was a monolithic faith and also mentioned "the People of the

JEDDAH 00000178 002 OF 002

Book" (Christianity and Judaism) as well as other faiths, including Buddhism and Hinduism. Regarding the film, he deemed it "an insult" and an "attempt to paint...Muslim(s) as bigots, terrorists and backward." He then condemned those who question the Koran "without proof or evidence" while adding that such acts will not slow the spread of Islam.

18. (C) Al-Munajjid discussed on April 4 the issue of divorce. He warned that unless society does something "drastic" to address the problem, the situation will continue to deteriorate. He cited an example from the life of Prophet Muhammad in which he advises couples to accept each other's strengths and weaknesses. "The key", he added, "is to focus on the positive aspects of your spouse's character" and reiterated that in Islam divorce is a last resort.

MECCA

CALLS ON MUSLIMS TO DEFEND MUHAMMAD, ENCOURAGES DIALOGUE AMONG ALL HUMAN BEINGS

19. (U) On March 21 Sheikh Usama Bin-Abdallah Khayyat at the Mecca Grand Mosque warned against allowing "the recalcitrance of emotions" to affect the value of justice or other people's rights. He added that people should stand for justice, and "follow not the lusts" of their hearts.

110. (U) Sheikh Dr. Abd-al-Rahman Bin-Abd-al-Aziz al-Sudays on March 28 spoke on the state of Arabs before Islam, stating that Muhammad "rescued the world." He then said that the message of Islam includes "justice, peace, guidance, dignity, and glory" and urged Muslims to defend Muhammad by "all means and capabilities." He also said that the "initiative" of Mecca and Medina call for "human coexistence that guarantees respect for the (holy) messages (Judaism and Christianity)..." and dialogue "between all human beings" to achieve "security" and "safety."

111. (U) Islamic law and how it creates benefits and realizes

interests was the focus of Sheikh Dr. Salih Bin-Humayd's April 4 sermon. He stated that it deters "forbidden things," "evils," and "harms." He then discussed the dangers of smoking and called for "issuing laws, regulations, and harsh instructions" to prevent it.

MEDINA

DESCRIBES ISLAM AS GUARANTOR OF FREEDOM, QUALIFIES PRACTICE
OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

¶12. (U) On March 21 Sheikh Salah al-Budayr spoke on the heart as "a center of faith" and stated how people with faith will be able to "renounce and reject tumults." Sheikh Ali Abd-al-Rahman al-Hudhayfi's March 28 sermon stressed the importance of "good offspring, which worship God," as well as the (recurring) theme of doing what is right and shunning what is wrong.

¶13. (U) Sheikh Abd-al-Bari al-Thubayti on April 4 discussed how Islam promotes and guarantees individual freedom, arguing that "humiliation and slavery to God" liberates people from "the power of bodily appetites...." However, he added that some of history's worst crimes have been committed in the name of freedom. He also commented on freedom of expression, stating that it does not mean that one can say what they want, but rather, that they exercise this freedom "within...the scale of religion."

TONEY